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Draft written by Mildred Persinger of Statement for Dr. Dorothy Height, March 8, 1978

Mildred Emory Persinger

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Recommended Citation

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Draft mP

Mar. 8, 1978

STATEMENT OF DR. DOROTHY HEIGHT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JOINT HEARING ON HR 11080

I am Dorothy Height, residing at 10 Waterside Plaza, New York City. I am the President of the National Council of Negro Women, an association of national black women's organizations. The Council has done extensive development work in the less developed sectors of the United States and has worked in cooperation with women in low income countries, particularly in Africa, to assist their efforts enhancing their basic role in community and national development.

For many years I also directed programs in leadership training and racial justice of the National Board of the YWCA. This multiracial, community-based organization of over two million members in the United States, has a long history of cooperative development efforts with women in 83 indigenous national YWCAs in all of the world's regions.

I would like to comment on the general question, Why women? Why should half of the population be put into a category needing special assistance? The answer is found in cultural patterns and traditions which have, in most of the world, assigned to this slight majority the status of a minority. And as we have learned in the United States, a large, undereducated, poor and socially isolated minority is a drag on development.

My responsibilities with the National Council and with the YWCA have taken me to India, various countries of Africa and the Caribbean and Latin America to observe women at work absolutely essential to the economy, especially in agriculture and food processing. In addition to their total responsibility for feeding rural populations, which include most of the people in the developing world, women in some countries, as construction workers on highways and public buildings are responsible for much of the infrastructure.

To see a mother wielding a pick axe or pushing a plough while carrying her baby on her back is to behold at once a brake and a potential accelerator of development in many countries. Yet this work of women, which supports the economic structure, and its relation to population growth, is ignored in government planning ministries and certainly in community councils.

In much of the world there exist two societies, one male and one female. Policies and plans for the whole, made from the perspective of only half of the population, run the risk of being only half right. So it is when men are taught modern farming methods, only to pass on the information, second-hand, to their wives, who are the practitioners.

The problem, then, is more than a matter of simple justice. The impact of modernization on traditional divisions of labor is producing some wrong answers. Tentatively and painfully, the correction to this one is being made in some quarters by women themselves.

Their efforts have been creative, ingenious and in some cases have changed a community from one of abject poverty to a centre of production. The key is to be found in the women's ability to take some control over their projects, to play a part in steering and managing them.

But their ability to do this has frequently depended on help from women's organizations aware of their problems, or from governments which employ women in their ministries or agencies who understand traditional cultural patterns. Such is the situation on the island of Vatulale where the tapa cloth makers are women. In 1976, they produced \$18,000 worth of bark cloth. The men, who make copra (dried coconut meat) added \$4,000 to the cooperative's funds but hold all of the decision-making posts. The women, with the help of a former woman member of Parliament, are mounting a campaign to change the imbalance.

The resulting decisions could be more supportive of development, as is the case, potentially, in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Women there are responsible for almost all of the basic labor involved in growing food and caring for the animals. When coffee was introduced as a cash crop to spur development, the men were trained to cultivate coffee, but the women picked the crop. The men now have money to buy Australian beer, of which they are large consumers. The women feel they are squandering the fruits of their labor, which they want to put to more effective use. A woman, Jean Kekedo, now heads The Village Task Force which is strenuously developing the women's right to be part of ~~production~~ ^{financial} decisions and to share in the proceeds of their own labor.

The need, then, is that the perspective and experience of women be part of the guidance system for development. The focus of U.S. bilateral programs on assistance to women as a separate group needing special attention, and their integration into development of their countries should specify that the priorities and objectives of the women concerned will be determining factors in the kind of assistance offered.

Multilateral efforts through the Voluntary Fund of the UN Decade for Women are already showing the effects of having more women decision-makers. The African Training and Research Development Centre for Women lodged in the Economic Commission for Africa has an impressive roster of women's development projects underway. The UN Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development has made application to the Voluntary Fund for well-planned projects for which the need has long been established. The U.S. contribution to the Fund will have considerable impact, but needs to be sustained in the

future to assure the pay-off on the investment.

Women, the secret weapon of development, are so far untried. And they are a double-faceted resource. Ample documentation suggests that education and jobs for women, so scarce in the developing world, are the key to solving the problem of making resources and people come out even. Possibly the reason this seemingly obvious fact has been so obscured is that most of those who decide how women should limit the size of their families, and why, are ~~men~~. When the number of their children hinders rather than helps them in the work they have to do and the role they have to play in the society, ~~they~~ ^{women} do indeed manage to slow down the birth rate.

bureaucrats and officials in population
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JOINT HEARING ON HR 11080

MARCH 8, 1978

Mr. Chair, distinguished members of the Committees: I am Dorothy I. Height, President of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. - a coalition of 27 national organizations with an outreach to 4 million women.

Founded 42 years ago when women had scarcely begun the struggle to become a functioning part of our own democracy, we in NCNW, as Black women, feel peculiarly fitted to speak in behalf of the women of developing countries who, for the most part, are in the early stages of the battle to enter the social, political and economic mainstreams of their societies.

The Council has done extensive developmental work in the less developed sectors of the United States and has worked in cooperation with women in low income countries, particularly in Africa, to assist their efforts enhancing their basic role in community and national development.

For many years I also directed programs in leadership training and racial justice of the National Board of the YWCA of the U.S.A. This multiracial, community-based organization of over

two million members in the United States, has a long history of cooperative development efforts with women in 83 indigenous national YWCAs in all of the world's regions.

I would like to comment on the general question, Why support women in development? Why should half of the world's population be put into a category needing special assistance? The answer is found in cultural patterns and traditions which, in most of the world, have assigned to this slight majority the status of a minority. And as we have learned in the United States, a large, undereducated, poor and socially isolated minority is a drag on development.

My responsibilities with the National Council of Negro Women and with the YWCA have taken me to India, and various countries of West Africa, Southern Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America to work with and to observe women at work absolutely essential to the economy of their countries. In addition to their responsibility for feeding rural populations, which include most of the people in the developing world, women in some countries, as construction workers on highways and public buildings, are responsible for much of the infrastructure.

To see a mother wielding a pick axe or pushing a plough while carrying her baby on her back is to behold at once a brake and a potential accelerator of development. Yet this work of women, which supports the economic structure, and its relation to population growth, is ignored in government planning ministries and certainly in community councils.

In much of the world there exist two societies, one male and one female. Policies and plans for the whole, made from the perspective of only half of the population, run the risk of being only half right. So it is when men are taught modern farming methods, only to pass on the information, secondhand, to their wives, who are the practitioners.

Of special concern is the plight of rural women who at best appear to have been ignored by development and at worst have suffered a deterioration in their levels of living as a result of recently introduced change processes such as the mechanization of agriculture.

A recent FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) publication reminds us that:

Every other woman in the world lives in the rural areas of developing countries. If the real key to economic development is people, if the most important resource of any nation is its men and women and children, surely women must have a fair share of the opportunity to make their contributions and to enjoy the benefits of development.

What are the facts about the present conditions of women in the developing world. Here are a few:

- Women are responsible for forty to eighty percent of all agricultural production in the less developed countries.
- Women are directly responsible for the health and nutrition of their families.
- Women are the first, and frequently the only, teachers of the young.

- Women are fifty percent of the partnerships that produce children and hence are critical to the planning and implementation of a population program.

On the other hand, women in the developing world:

- Are by tradition, confined to the home and farm.
- Have unequal, if any, rights to land, property and credit.
- Are frequently malnourished, as are their children, and weakened by numerous pregnancies.
- Are predominantly illiterate, with rates of illiteracy much higher among women than among men.

Every other woman in the developing countries frequently works as an unpaid farm laborer, yet seldom receives any agricultural training, benefits from cooperatives, extension, marketing or credit services.

In addition to farm work, women spend long hours carrying water and gathering fuel, preparing food by laborious methods of hand labor, caring for children and maintaining a home.

Another serious difficulty in many areas is the fact that women often bear responsibility as head of the household because men have gone to cities and to nearby countries in search of employment. This is an acute problem in countries such as the Southern African nation of Botswana where, at any one time, 80 per cent of the adult male population is in South Africa working in mines or at other employment.

The problem, then, is more than a matter of simple justice. The impact of modernization on traditional divisions of labor is producing some wrong answers. Tentatively and painfully, the correction to this one is being made in some quarters by women themselves.

Their efforts have been creative, ingenious and in some cases have changed a community from one of abject poverty to a centre of production. The key is to be found in the women's ability to take some control over their projects, to play a part in steering and managing them.

But their ability to do this has frequently depended on help from women's voluntary organizations aware of their problems, or from governments which employ women in their ministries or agencies who understand traditional cultural patterns. Such is the situation on the island of Vatulele^{7,11}, where the tapa cloth makers are women. In 1976, they produced \$18,000 worth of bark cloth. The men, who make copra (dried coconut meat) added \$4,000 to the cooperative's funds but hold all of the decision-making posts. The women, with the help of a former woman member of Parliament, are mounting a campaign to change the imbalance.

The resulting decisions could be more supportive of development, as is the case, potentially, in the highlands of New Guinea. Women there are responsible for almost all of the basic labor involved in growing food and caring for the animals. When coffee was introduced as a cash crop to spur development, the men were

trained to cultivate coffee. But the women picked the crop. The men now have money to buy Australian beer, of which they are large consumers. The women feel they are squandering the fruits of their labor, which they want to put to more effective use. A woman, Jean Kekedo, now heads The Village Task Force which is strenuously developing the women's right to be part of financial decisions and to share in the proceeds of their own labor.

The perspective and experience of women must be part of the guidance system for development. The focus of U.S. bilateral programs on assistance to women as a separate group needing special attention, and their integration into development of their countries should specify that the priorities and objectives of the women concerned will be determining factors in the kind of assistance offered.

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Women, the secret weapon of development, are so far untried. And they are a double-faceted resource. Ample documentation suggests that education and jobs for women, so scarce in the developing world, are the key to solving the problem of making resources and people come out even. Possibly the reason this seemingly obvious fact has been so obscured is that most of those who decide how women should limit the size of their families, and why, are far away. When the number of their children hinders rather than helps them in the work they have to do and the role they have to play in the society, women do indeed manage to slow down the birth rate.

What do women need to improve their conditions? It is not enough to say that women are walking on the roads being built in their countries by outside assistance. It is not enough to say that women are crossing the bridges being constructed with assistance from donor nations. As women have their special needs growing out of decades of denial, they must have special attention paid to relieve these conditions of poverty and neglect.

The 5 year minimum goals described in 1975 during International Women's Year constitute a World Plan of Action that may be used as guidelines for action.

By 1980, we should be able to note:

- a marked increase in literacy and civic education for women, especially in the rural areas

- co-educational technical and vocational training extended to men and women in the industrial and agricultural sectors
- equal access to education at every level, compulsory education for all, and action taken to prevent school dropouts
- increased employment opportunities for women, reduction of unemployment, and greater efforts to eliminate discrimination in the terms and conditions of employment
- greater participation of women in policymaking positions at the local, national, and international levels
- increased provision for health, education, sanitation, nutrition planning and other welfare services
- recognition of the economic value of women's work in the home, in domestic food production and marketing and voluntary activities not traditionally remunerated
- direction of formal, nonformal and lifelong education toward the re-evaluation of man and woman, in order to ensure their full realization as individuals, as family members and in society
- the promotion of women's organizations
- the establishment of machinery within the government for accelerating the achievement of equal opportunities for women and their full integration into national life.

Women do need support in development. And, to paraphrase the message of a distinguished African leader: Women want to be

not only the beneficiaries of development, they want and must have a hand in shaping the processes of development.

Draft written by MP
for D H